

**Force Structure for High- and Low-Intensity Warfare:  
The Anglo-American Experience and Lessons for the Future**

**By Dr. Daniel Marston, Royal Military Academy Sandhurst**

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## **Force Structure for High- and Low-Intensity Warfare: The Anglo-American Experience and Lessons for the Future**

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This paper will attempt to address two of the key questions raised by the NIC in preparation for this conference. First, will the “universe” of conflict continue to occur below the nuclear threshold and will it continue to be characterized by a blend of high-end, state-versus-state and unconventional war (low-intensity conflict)? Or, alternatively will unconventional, special operations, police work, and a ubiquitous dependence on intelligence grow into the principle characteristic of conflict, while “classic” organized state militaries are used mainly as a support and deterrent force? This paper will also consider the operational level of conflict to identify emerging new concepts of operations, such as using unmanned systems, that could have a profound effect on the nature of war. By 2020, will technology change the way that low-intensity and unconventional conflict is waged? This paper will attempt to answer the first and second questions based upon the experiences and needs of the US and UK militaries.

Predicting future war is incredibly difficult, and many historians and theorists have been ridiculed for attempting to do so. Having said that, however, there are general themes from the past and present that will undoubtedly be relevant in the future. For the purposes of this paper, I will assume that conflict in the next 15 years will take place below the nuclear threshold.<sup>1</sup> The larger and more important question is, what will war encompass below this threshold?

The future for both the American and British militaries potentially encompasses three different levels of conflict. The first is state-versus-state, conventional war (high-intensity)<sup>2</sup>, which is also the least likely between any of the “first powers”<sup>3</sup> of the world.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Due to the Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD) promised by nuclear weapons, it is generally assumed that states will not risk their usage.

<sup>2</sup> There is some debate regarding definitions of high- and low-intensity conflict, and various authors over the years have attempted to change or adapt the definitions provided by General Frank Kitson in his seminal work,

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The second, which is more likely, is a war that may begin as a high-intensity conflict but, due to overwhelming US/UK military might, will collapse into an asymmetrical<sup>5</sup> or low-intensity war.<sup>6</sup> In this paper the terms should be understood as: high intensity—conventional war between two states (WWI, WWII, Arab-Israeli Wars, Gulf War I, etc.); low intensity—all operations other than conventional war. The third type of conflict will encompass the support of a friendly state, and utilize a range of forces, from Special Forces (SOFs) to conventional troops, against an insurgent force.<sup>7</sup>

The present conflict in Iraq may or may not be indicative of the type of scenario that the US and UK will face in the future, and so both states need militaries that are capable of engaging in either high- or low-intensity conflict, and of switching back and forth between the two as circumstances require. Predictions for future war will mean nothing if our forces are not able to deal with the specialized needs of both sorts of conflict. General Frank Kitson noted, more than 30 years ago, when he was looking at the future of war: “all in all the 1970s may turn out to be as stormy as the 1960s, if not more so, but it is none the less virtually impossible to plot the path of storms . . . whether in Europe or overseas, the pattern of conflict is such that it is virtually impossible to imagine

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*Low Intensity Operations.* The debate over the definition of “high intensity” does not center on total versus limited, but to what extent the various militaries sought the destruction of the opponents’ “main” forces. Insurgencies, counter-insurgency operations, peacekeeping, and peace enforcement are generally lumped together as “low intensity.” There are of course some wars that are difficult to classify, such as the Vietnam War (1965-73). This involved aspects of both high- and low-intensity, as the US did not invade the North to destroy the main forces of the NVA, which would have conclusively defined it as high intensity. My definition of low-intensity warfare tends to agree with Kitson’s, as do both US and UK doctrine, which classify all conflicts short of conventional war as Operations Other than War (OOTW). The caveat to this definition is, as Christopher Bellamy comments, that “it [is] a form of shorthand, to embrace several kinds of operations defined not only by their intensity, as such, but their political origins and character. To read an interesting debate on terminology, see Christopher Bellamy, “Spiral through Time: Beyond ‘Conflict Intensity’,” *Strategic & Combat Studies Institute*, Camberley, UK, 1998, pp. 16-31.

<sup>3</sup> Used to designate, collectively, Australia, Canada, China, Japan, New Zealand, the USA, and Western Europe.

<sup>4</sup>Realistically, war between the UK and France, or the US and Russia is unlikely. However, two states such as Vietnam and Laos may begin a territorial dispute that could spiral into a high-intensity war.

<sup>5</sup> The present US Joint Chiefs of Staff definition of asymmetrical warfare is: “attempts to circumvent or undermine an opponent’s strengths while exploiting his weaknesses using methods that differ significantly from the opponent’s usual mode of operations.” Roger Barnett, *Asymmetrical Warfare: Today’s Challenge to US Military Power*, Brassey’s, Washington, DC, 2003, p. 15.

<sup>6</sup> The present war in Iraq is an example of this. The initial war envisioned the destruction of the Iraqi “main” forces, and was successful, but the Iraqis have created a second conflict involving low-intensity elements. The Coalition did not focus sufficiently on planning for nation building. The DoD’s explanation for this was that they had been told by Chalabi that they would be greeted with roses, but if we plan such engagements in the future, we will need to be ready for insurgencies and nation-building. Military troops will need to coordinate very closely with civilian agencies in rebuilding activities.

<sup>7</sup> Such as British operations in Oman (1970-5, see below) or US SOFs deployment in the Philippines.

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an orthodox [conventional] war taking place without an accompanying campaign of subversion or insurgency, although the reverse is by no means true.”<sup>8</sup> It is understood that while both states may create doctrine and train their troops accordingly, there will still be potential problems. Lessons from the past are important, but they must be adapted to new situations. A constant assessment process for both forces must be applied for both high- and low-intensity warfare. Principles of warfare are important, but it must always be understood that officers and men will adapt principles to the situations in which they find themselves.

### **Future War**

Predicting the future is a pastime fraught with danger, and not a new one. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, various military theorists attempted to gauge what the next wars would encompass and how various weapons systems might influence events on the battlefield.<sup>9</sup> All of the militaries engaged in combat during this period demonstrated the shortcomings of the various theories, and proved repeatedly that all theories and doctrines had to adapt to the unpredictable and changeable environment of the real battlefield. British Military Doctrine 1996 asserts that “predicting the nature of modern warfare is a notoriously unreliable process. . . . [A] middle [course] must be steered between experience and projections of futuristic weapons. . . . The first safe assumption is that war will occur where it is little expected and that warfare will assume at least a partly unforeseen form.”<sup>10</sup>

While the exact scope of future war is difficult to gauge, there are some signposts from the past that help to indicate the direction that future conflicts may take. The first is that guerrilla, or insurgent, or low-intensity war has been with the world as long as conventional or high-intensity warfare. Since 1945, of all the conflicts in the world, only

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<sup>8</sup> General Frank Kitson, *Low Intensity Operations*, London, Faber and Faber, 1971, p. 27. Note that this was written at the height of the Cold War, well before the establishment of the “New World Order.”

<sup>9</sup> There are many examples of this phenomenon. One is the use of tanks in the inter-war period and in the Yom Kippur War. Tanks were expected to be a breakthrough weapons system, but each army developed different theories about their use. Even the Germans, who are often cited as the premier users of mechanized forces, encountered problems in deploying tanks effectively and in adapting their capabilities to changing strategic situations. The Israelis were guilty of over-reliance on tanks and air during the Yom Kippur War, having misinterpreted the lessons of the Six-Day War.

<sup>10</sup> *British Military Doctrine*, 1997 edition.

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12% can be classified as high-intensity wars (e.g., the Arab-Israeli and India-Pakistan conflicts).<sup>11</sup> By 2020, 90% of the world's population will live in the developing world,<sup>12</sup> and developing world nation-states will not have the wealth or capability to deal with the "first powers" on a level playing field. The overwhelming military might and pre-emptive strategies employed by the US and its junior partner, the UK, will make any conventional war scenario very unlikely. Instead, the conflicts the US and UK are more likely to face would chiefly be low-intensity means where opponents would be using whatever capabilities they have at their disposal.<sup>13</sup>

There is little reason to suppose that conventional, state-versus-state conflict will take a larger role in future war than it has in the post-World War II era. The significant high-intensity conflicts of the past 60 years, chiefly in South Asia and the Middle East, have left the participants apparently deadlocked. Both India and Pakistan have nuclear weapons, which now may well keep the struggle over Kashmir from being either escalated or resolved. (The potential diplomatic intervention of the US, UK, and other nations [like maybe Russia] to discourage any escalation is also a factor.<sup>14</sup>) Israel's demonstrated conventional military capability, coupled with her nuclear weapons, will most likely deter any Arab state from attempting to launch a conventional campaign against them. In both of these case studies of formerly conventional conflicts, the point to remember is that, due to the apparent limitations of high-intensity conflict, both have devolved into low-intensity operations<sup>15</sup>: an insurgency in Kashmir, and the second Intifada in Israel.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Brian Holden Reid, "Enduring Patterns in Modern Warfare," *The Nature of Future Conflict: Implications for Force Development*, Strategic & Combat Studies Institute, Camberley, UK, 1998, p. 28.

<sup>12</sup> Jennifer Morrison Taw and Bruce Hoffman, "The Urbanization of Insurgency: The Political Challenge to US Army Operations," *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (spring 1995), p. 68.

<sup>13</sup> Kitson forecasted the potential for low-intensity operations in the 1970s, and Andrew Krepinevich predicted, in his 1986 book *Army and Vietnam*, that "low-intensity warfare represents the most likely arena of future conflict for the [US] Army, and counterinsurgency the most demanding contingency." p. 274. Both men were writing during the height of the Cold War.

<sup>14</sup> Political pressure from both Washington and London after the recent terrorist attack on the Indian Parliament was probably instrumental in lessening the likelihood of all-out war.

<sup>15</sup> Both the Israeli Defence Forces and the Indian Army are experiencing difficulty applying proper long-term solutions to situations in which they find themselves dealing with low-intensity conflict.

<sup>16</sup> One potential threat to this apparent state of détente is if the insurgencies in either area were to provide the spark to re-ignite a larger conflict. This is a difficult scenario to gauge and, leaving this possibility aside, it is

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The one place where a high-intensity war involving the US (and maybe the UK) is a possibility in the near future is North Korea. Here again, however, it would be a mistake to focus only on conventional tactics. These would be required in the first phase, but there would also be a need to prepare for a second, low-intensity campaign. Since a US/UK coalition would be dominant in a high-intensity engagement with North Korea, the likelihood is that the conventional scenario would collapse into an insurgency. The forces involved would need to be trained properly for both roles, as well as for the strategic planning necessary to involve civilian forces in taking responsibility for aspects of a low-intensity campaign. Given the totalitarian government currently in place in North Korea and the dire economic conditions experienced by most of the population, a military force would need the capability to demonstrate a viable and desirable alternative, and to undertake nation-building activities.

Aside from the North Korean example, future conflicts between states are likely to be low intensity. This could occur within sovereign states as well as between states. The situation in Indian Administered Kashmir provides an excellent example of this scenario. The Indian government has consistently accused the Pakistani government of supporting “Muslim terrorists” in the Indian-occupied sector. The unrest thus promoted constitutes a low-intensity operation, which keeps the sector unstable and ill at ease.

The Middle East region provides another example, in which various governments are under internal pressure of various kinds from Islamic fundamentalists to sever their ties with western powers. The governments in the region have been able to maintain power so far, but there is no guarantee they will be able to continue to do so indefinitely. Consider Saudi Arabia in such a scenario. The pressure upon the present government is considerable and is likely to increase. What will the role of the US and UK be? If the Saudi government is under increasing pressure, do we deploy troops? If we deploy troops, do we do so with SOFs in a limited and specialized role, as the British did in the Dhofar Rebellion in Oman, 1970-1975<sup>17</sup>? Or do we send in major and visible support, in

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unlikely that the US/UK would intervene in these areas with military force, preferring instead to rely on political pressure.

<sup>17</sup> The operations of the British in Oman are an important case study of a small operation with SAS. The British role in the area was significant but has always been kept quiet. To this day, in Oman, the role of the SAS

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the form of 100,000 troops? What are the ramifications for a significant show of US/UK force in support of the existing government, or against it, for that matter?

The present operation in Iraq is providing some glaring examples of lessons to be learned for the future. If the US and/or the UK decide to invade a particular country, either to re-instate a specific ruler or government or to topple a ‘negative’ regime, the outcome will be based upon the military’s ability to do two things: support the new system of government; and wage both high- and low-intensity warfare.

One incentive for beginning an insurgency campaign against the US, especially, is that at present, the US military does not appear to have grasped, organizationally, the fundamentals of waging a low-intensity war, which gives any insurgent group an advantage. As a result, the current operations in Iraq, which at this stage are chiefly low-intensity, could potentially be continuing in 2020. Compare this situation to the British counterinsurgency (COIN) campaign in Northern Ireland; in 1971, General Kitson stated that “it [was] reasonable to hope that the present Emergency [would] be resolved in five years.”<sup>18</sup> The British Army is still operating in Northern Ireland, 33 years later.

The US and UK are likely to continue to intervene in the affairs of sovereign states when they feel that their homelands are threatened. The likelihood is not great that this scenario will arise with a state of comparable size or capability, although this is not guaranteed.<sup>19</sup> If the US and UK were to embark on wars against small countries that may originate as conventional conflicts, e.g., to bring about a regime change, they may well find the conflicts may end as insurgencies. They might also intervene in support of a friendly government seeking military support in dealing with insurgents in its own territory. Ongoing operations in Iraq may also limit the future use of US and UK troops. Both countries have been wary of increasing casualty rates due to the potential for

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is not advertised. For more information on the campaign, see Tony Jeapes, *SAS Secret War*; John Akehurst, *We Won a War*; Kenneth Perkins, *A Fortunate Soldier*; Ian Beckett and John Pimlott, *Armed Forces and Modern Counter-Insurgency*; and Thomas Mockaitis, *British Counterinsurgency in the Post Imperial Age*.

<sup>18</sup> Kitson, *Low Intensity*, p. 24.

<sup>19</sup> Russia and China should never be ruled out, as both are likely to maintain major conventional and nuclear forces.

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diminished public support at home. The US government, in particular, is concerned with public perception of ‘body bags.’<sup>20</sup>

Counter-insurgency doctrine, correctly incorporated into military training and deployment, supposes that an insurgency will take many years to win or at least resolve to the benefit of both parties. Leaders in the US and UK, both political and military, will thus have to understand that the campaign in Iraq, or any similar situation, will involve a long, hard slog. They will then need to decide if the threat to national interests is worth the potential long-term commitment. There are no quick victories in insurgencies. However, if what the future holds for US and UK forces is intervention and participation in these operations, then they must be properly trained and supported with adequate doctrine.

Professor Colin McInnes, University of Aberystwyth comments that “[the British Army] approach to change by and large has been evolutionary and conservative, preferring caution and well proven solutions to the riskier option of radical change. Doctrine therefore has evolved rather than being wholly rewritten. . . the Army’s structure continues to emphasise high capability forces for high intensity warfare, even though that is the Army’s least likely operational deployment.”<sup>21</sup> This is a useful point for the US military to consider in planning for the future.

## **Force Structure for the Future**

At present, both US and UK forces have appropriate structures and doctrines in place for at least one aspect of any potential future conflict. In the past 100 years, many armies have attempted to gauge the future of war and adapt accordingly. There are not many examples of proper adaptation. US and UK forces already have the capacity to

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<sup>20</sup> The recent controversy surrounding photos of US caskets arriving on planes from Iraq underscores the political sensitivity of this issue in the US. The British, by contrast, have been able to display images of dead soldiers’ caskets on their own MoD website.

<sup>21</sup> Colin McInnes, “The British Army: Adapting to change in the 1990s and beyond,” *The Nature of Future Conflict: Implications for Force Development*, Strategic & Combat Studies Institute, Camberley, UK, 1998, p. 75.

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develop proper structures for future high-intensity warfare. Both military forces, however, need to expand their training to cover both high- and low-intensity conflict.<sup>22</sup>

In an expanded training scenario, conventional training should occupy the principal role. Conventional warfare encapsulates all of the basic principles and doctrines of waging war, and thus provides a sound foundation. Low-intensity training uses this foundation, and then expands into the areas of doctrine and tactics specific to low-intensity campaigns. The most important aspect of low-intensity conflict is counter-insurgency (COIN). The principles of COIN are generally classified as: recognition of the political nature of the insurgency; establishment of a civil-military command and control structure with civilian supremacy; importance of intelligence and proper human intelligence gathering; splitting the insurgents from the population by propaganda and winning hearts and minds; destroying the insurgents if the opportunity presents itself; political reforms to prevent re-occurrence. Trainees learn the basic differences between the two types of conflict: whereas conventional war envisions the destruction of the main forces of the enemy and makes military goals paramount, COIN envisions the military acting in support of a civil authority and seeks to understand the political, social, and economic (as well as military) aspects of the campaign.<sup>23</sup>

Over the course of the past fifteen years, the American and British forces have benefited from a closer relationship and greater operational interdependence. Joint training exercises are held regularly all over the world, and liaison officers work together at planning HQs throughout the various commands. The British, due to their size, are the obvious junior partner in the relationship. This part of the paper will consider both militaries' current capability to operate in combined high- and low-intensity operations,

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<sup>22</sup> Contrary to common belief, armored infantry and armored formations *can* carry out low-intensity operations, even in conjunction with high-intensity operations. I recently interviewed officers of a British armoured regiment that had served in Operation Telic (Gulf War II), who discussed their experiences in carrying out both sorts of conflict. Due to the fact that these men are still on active duty, I will refer to these interviews without citing regiments or names. This will also apply to interviews I have carried out with other senior British officers.

<sup>23</sup> This has been the chief role of the military as described by various COIN theorists, including Robert Thompson, *Defeating Communist Insurgency*; Frank Kitson, *Low Intensity Operations* and *Bunch of Five*; Douglas Blaufarb, *The Counterinsurgency Era*; Robert Komer, *Beaucracy at War*; Peter Paret, *French Counterinsurgency Warfare from Indo-China to Algeria*; John Nagl, *Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam*, and Andrew Krepovich, *Army and Vietnam*.

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as well as proposals for the future. Due to my background, much of the discussion will deal with land-based operations.

The issue raised in the second half of the first question, “Will unconventional, special operations, police work and a ubiquitous dependence on intelligence grow into the principle characteristic of conflict, while ‘classic’ organized state militaries are used mainly as a support and deterrent force?” has special relevance for the US defense establishment. There is a debate in the US defense establishment now as to whether Special Forces should be expanded to be the force to be used in COIN, or whether more of the rest of the US Army should be made more SOF-like. US Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld has called for the expansion of SOFs, apparently taking the view that the more you have, the more you can deploy. I believe that such a system will leave the SOFs watered down and their specialized assets lost. An army trained in COIN, on the other hand, will leave the SOFs free to do what they do best—act as a strategic, rather than a tactical, asset.

The British approach has been somewhat different. British SOFs, particularly the SAS, have led the way in developing certain aspects of COIN, but the vast majority of the current doctrine has been drawn from lessons learned by the British Army as a whole. The SAS are trained in COIN and have often been on exercise or attachment to provide training in COIN to friendly countries. Most of the COIN operations during the post-WWII period, however, have been carried out by the regular British Army and Royal Marines, as well as the SAS.

### **US Land Forces<sup>24</sup>**

At present, US land forces operate extremely well in the context of high-intensity warfare. Current doctrine reflects this excellent record. The conventional side of the

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<sup>24</sup> Most of the material for this section focuses on US Army doctrine. Due to time constraints, I was not able to consult very much material relevant to the USMC. However, I was able to speak with Bruce Gudmundsson and Colonel Reginald Ghiden USMC (ret.). Both indicated that the USMC has closely followed the US Army in regarding conventional war as “real war” and has generally dismissed the lessons gathered by the USMC from COIN operations in I Corps in South Vietnam. Various conversations since December 2003.

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conflict in Iraq was a success, reinforcing the reasons why most states will not attempt a conventional war against the US.

In the area of low-intensity operations, US land forces have not been adequately trained and current doctrine does not reflect the need for such training. If America intends to pursue terrorists around the world, including raids into harboring countries, or to intervene in internal conflicts for humanitarian reasons, she will need to incorporate low-intensity operations into both training and doctrine. As an American Colonel, Daniel Bolger, asserted in 1991: “to meet further challenges, America’s Army must turn from the warm and well-deserved glow of the Persian Gulf victory (1990/1991, high intensity) and embrace, once more, the real business of regulars, the stinking gray shadow world of ‘savage wars of peace’, as Rudyard Kipling called them.”<sup>25</sup>

The American land forces are a highly competent and professional force. So why, then, do current operations in Iraq indicate that they are unfamiliar with the parameters of a proper low-intensity operational plan? It comes down to the fact that the lessons that armies learn from past victories and defeats may not be the correct lessons. The post-Vietnam COIN debate within the US Army provides a good example of this phenomenon. In examining this discussion, it is evident that lessons and possible solutions lie not only in examinations of British COIN doctrine, but also with US doctrine and experience that extends over 60 years. Larry Cable notes that “until the great failure of US policy in Vietnam . . . American political and military experience had shown repeatedly that the US government and military were capable of developing good ideas concerning the nature of insurgency, the requirements for successfully countering it.”<sup>26</sup> Past history demonstrates that the needs for the US are not revolutionary but evolutionary.

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<sup>25</sup> Daniel Bolger, “The Ghosts of Omdurman,” *Parameters* (Autumn 1991), pp. 31-32.

<sup>26</sup> Larry Cable, “Reinventing the Round Wheel: Insurgency, Counter-Insurgency, and Peacekeeping Post Cold War,” *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (Autumn 1993), p. 228.

## **Doctrinal Debate since Vietnam**

Major John Nagl<sup>27</sup> pointed out, in his important study of the Vietnam War, that “the US Army has failed to form a consensus on the lessons of Vietnam and has not accepted the idea that revolutionary war requires a qualitatively different response from the conventional warfare it knows so well how to fight.”<sup>28</sup> The US Army and US Marines have continued to experience difficulties with low-intensity operations, principally because the higher command has not incorporated the appropriate lessons of COIN in general and Vietnam in particular.

Attempts to analyze and understand the failings of the US Army in Vietnam have been divided into two distinct doctrinal camps. The first attempts to assess the lessons from Vietnam began at the Army War College in 1974, attempting “not to assume that there’s a point-to-point relationship between the lessons of Vietnam and what we would do the next time, but toward an open, professionally stimulated and informed leadership corps, believing that anyone would be delinquent not to learn.”<sup>29</sup>

This attempt was stymied by General William DePuy, who, in overseeing the preparation of the 1976 US Army doctrine document, FM 100-5 *Operations*, turned the army away from Vietnam lessons to focus on large conventional wars. This document contained no mention of COIN. Following this omission, the Command and General Staff College cut the topic of COIN from 44 to nine hours of instruction by 1979.<sup>30</sup>

The 1980s proved to be a defining period for US Army doctrine and understanding of low-intensity warfare, characterized by the interpretations of two very different books, one written under the Army’s auspices and the other not. The first book, the 1982 study *On Strategy: A Critical Analysis of the Vietnam War*, was commissioned by the Army War College and written by Colonel Harry Summers. The central thesis of Summers’ book was that the US had wasted its resources fighting a COIN operation in

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<sup>27</sup> Major Nagl is currently serving in Iraq and attempting to implement COIN techniques in his command area. See Peter Maass’ “Professor Nagl’s War,” *The New York Times*, January 11, 2004.

<sup>28</sup> John Nagl, *Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam: Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife*, Praeger, 2002, p. 205.

<sup>29</sup> Nagl, pp. 205-6.

<sup>30</sup> Nagl, p. 206.

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South Vietnam and should instead have taken the war to the North Vietnamese Army, using a conventional approach. This theory was widely acclaimed in the US Army in the 1980s as the sole reason for failure in Vietnam and the rationale for refocusing its efforts on conventional warfare. Michael Hennessey commented that “many in the US military [had] come to regard the basic concepts of counterinsurgency doctrine as fatally flawed or directed toward truly unobtainable goals.”<sup>31</sup>

Not all army officers agreed with these findings. The most important book stating the other side of the argument was Major Andrew Krepinevich’s *The Army and Vietnam*. Krepinevich’s central thesis is that the US Army fought the wrong war in Vietnam. Proper COIN operations were never allowed to take hold, pushed aside in an attempt to seek a major conventional war with the main forces of the North Vietnamese Army. Krepinevich concluded that “the result [of US policy in Vietnam] has been instead of gaining a better understanding of how to wage counterinsurgency warfare within the unique social, economic, political, and military dimensions comprising that form of conflict . . . the Army has learned little of value.”<sup>32</sup>

The Reagan administration reinforced most of Summers’ viewpoints. In 1983, the administration published the ‘Weinberger Doctrine’, which was widely construed as an attempt to structure military policy to avoid future Vietnam scenarios. Robert Komer noted, after the Weinberger Doctrine was published, “of course insurgencies did not stop occurring. Moreover, a decade after the fall of Saigon, there has been a modest revival of US interest in COIN. . . . But we still do not seem to have profited by many of the operational lessons so expensively learned in Vietnam. . . . [T]hose who do not learn from history are condemned to repeat it.”<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Michael Hennessey, *Strategy in Vietnam: The Marines and Revolutionary Warfare in I Corps, 1965-1972*, Praeger, 1997, p. 7.

<sup>32</sup> Krepinevich, pp. 274-5. Robert Komer, the former head of the attempted COIN strategy in Vietnam, CORDS, published *Bureaucracy at War* about this time. His work supports Krepinevich and dismisses Summers.

<sup>33</sup> Komer, p. 173.

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At this juncture, the US Army also began to develop its new Air-Land Battle<sup>34</sup> or “Maneuverist Warfare” (MW) doctrine.<sup>35</sup> While the new doctrine emphasizes overwhelming firepower to defeat a main enemy, there are aspects that cross over to COIN doctrine. For example, MW stresses the need for junior leadership and initiative, which is also a cornerstone of COIN doctrine. A COIN operation is often described as a platoon officer’s war. This had not been specified in previous US doctrine as far as my research indicates. Larry Cable’s comments appear to support this; he states that “doctrinal statements developed in the 1980s. . . demonstrate a complete and pervasive ignorance of the historical realities governing counter-insurgency.”<sup>36</sup>

The end of the Cold War has changed the landscape of conflict. Despite the possibility of future interventions in small wars around the world, the US military has made no fundamental changes to its recent doctrine. Low-intensity conflict has been redefined as “Operations Other Than War” (OOTW), which incorporates all fighting not classified as high intensity. As of the mid-1990s, both doctrine and training of the military were showing gaps. General Maxwell Thurman asserted that “the military education system does not prepare officers adequately for such activities [OOTW] or equip them with the in-depth knowledge . . . to be able to co-ordinate the activities of [a counter]insurgency team.”<sup>37</sup> Jennifer Taw and John Peters, examining the implications of low-intensity conflicts for the US Army in 1995, found shortcomings in OOTW doctrine and training. They also identified the US military’s emphasis on overwhelming force.<sup>38</sup> They acknowledge that there have been attempts in the 1990s to update US Army doctrine<sup>39</sup>, but assert that there is still much to be done.<sup>40</sup> Writing in 2002, Nagl confirms that many of the issues raised in the 1990s have not been addressed, and describes the consequences: “By failing to learn the lessons of Vietnam, the US Army continued to

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<sup>34</sup> The new doctrine was similar to the “Army Concept” that predated it. Krepinevich commented that “characteristics of the ‘Army Concept’ are two: a focus on conventional war and a reliance on heavy firepower to minimize casualties.” Krepinevich, pp. 4-7.

<sup>35</sup> This doctrine now defines both the US military and British Army. Debates about the validity of the new doctrine are beyond the scope of this paper.

<sup>36</sup> Cable, p. 253.

<sup>37</sup> Jennifer Taw and John Peters, “Operations other Than War: Implications for the US Army,” *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, Vol. 6, No. 3, (Winter 1995), p. 400.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> The 1993 FM 100-5 *Operations* committed only eight pages to OOTW.

<sup>40</sup> See Taw and Peters, Vol. 6, pp. 402-4.

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prepare itself to fight the wrong war.”<sup>41</sup> British officers who have served alongside US forces in Iraq echo this sentiment.<sup>42</sup>

The US military has the resources to re-examine and update its doctrine and training. The US military has the professionalism and expertise to adopt and apply COIN techniques, and has successfully utilized COIN strategies in the past.<sup>43</sup> For fundamental, structural change to happen, the White House and the Department of Defense will have to tell the US military to shift its focus. Assuming this is feasible, the US military can also use a close relationship with their British counterparts to absorb some of the lessons of COIN that the British have slowly and painfully learned through 50 years of COIN operations. There are indications that such a shift in focus is already happening: in a recent high-level war game in Washington, DC, the US forces, initially engaged against a conventional enemy, quickly found themselves in an insurgency. The planners acknowledged the difficulty of grappling with this situation, and commented that there were valuable lessons to be learned.<sup>44</sup>

### **British Forces and Experiences:**

Most of this section is based upon conversations with British officers regarding operations in Iraq, to outline lessons and techniques that might be useful to the US military in present and future low-intensity situations. This is not to imply that the British are experts in COIN and in a position to instruct the US military in the proper use of COIN. Most of current British COIN doctrine has been formed through years of painful trial and error.<sup>45</sup>

As stated earlier, current British doctrine relating to maneuver (high-intensity) warfare is comprehensive, although lessons from Iraq have demonstrated some

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<sup>41</sup> Nagl, p. 208.

<sup>42</sup> Interviews with British officers in Germany and UK, March 2004.

<sup>43</sup> See Larry Cable, “Reinventing the Wheel,” *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, Vol. 4, No. 2; Laurence Greenberg, *The Hukbalahap Insurrection*; Napoleon Valeriano and Charles Bohannon, *Counterinsurgency Operations*; Douglas Blaufarb, *The Counterinsurgency Era*, USMC Small Wars Manual (1940); and Michael Hennessey, *Strategy in Vietnam*.

<sup>44</sup> Conversation with a senior officer, May 2004. He also commented that he was not sure the generals would have drawn the same conclusion in January 2003, before experiencing the situation in Iraq.

<sup>45</sup> Northern Ireland from 1970-5 provides an excellent example of both insufficient doctrine and painful trial and error.

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shortcomings in the areas of logistics, and the superior resources of the US military means that practically, the British will continue to depend upon the US for support in various areas. In general, however, all of the forces deployed in Iraq fulfilled their roles in keeping with the expectations of current doctrine.<sup>46</sup>

The UK doctrine and training structure considers conventional warfare as the primary consideration. COIN technique is an important aspect of warfare that must be mastered, but only after a thorough grounding in conventional battle doctrine. COIN doctrine in the UK is fairly well developed, and a process has been established by which lessons of conflict are evaluated by the Ministry of Defence and incorporated into doctrine. This process has accelerated in the past 10 years, and the establishment of the process itself is the result of learning lessons. While British COIN doctrine dates back as far as the Malayan Emergency (1948-60),<sup>47</sup> the British Army has failed periodically to prepare for operations involving COIN technique; the first years of the Northern Ireland operation provide an instructive example. Having realized this error, the British Army took steps not to repeat it, and throughout the 1970s and 1980s, British Army troops were trained both for potential conventional conflict against the Warsaw Pact states and for deployment to Northern Ireland. The Army established a training center in Kent specifically for COIN training.<sup>48</sup>

The British siege of Basra (March-April 2003) highlights their particular approach. Over the course of several weeks, the British surrounded the city. Instead of launching a full-blown conventional attack, the British undertook small- and large-scale raids in order to wear down, demoralize, and infiltrate the Iraqi opposition, and gather intelligence necessary to accurately assess the fighting ability and location of the Iraqi opposition. The British did not seek a major battle for fear of massive civilian casualties

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<sup>46</sup> Interviews with British officers, March 2004.

<sup>47</sup> *The Conduct of Anti-terrorist Operations in Malaya, 1952; Anti-Mau Mau Operations, 1954; Keeping the Peace, 1957 and 1963; Land Operations "Counter-Revolutionary Operations," 1969 and 1977; and the current Army Field Manual Vol. 1, Combined Arms Operations, "Counter Insurgency Operations", 2001.* The current text devotes nearly 200 pages to insurgency and COIN. It discusses the past and ends by articulating the principles of British COIN.

<sup>48</sup> Some American troops and officers have been sent to this school in recent months before deployment to Iraq. Some of the training staff have commented that some of the Americans do not seem to take the training seriously. Interviews with British officers, March 2004.

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in a city of 1.5 million people. Despite some criticism of what was perceived as hesitancy on the part of the commander, Major General Robin Brims, the British carried on with their strategy, completing probing raids and gaining human intelligence. The city was eventually taken in a major raid with the loss of only two British soldiers.<sup>49</sup>

The main advantage that the British have over their American counterparts is that they have learned, as the result of 35 years on operation in Northern Ireland, that training in low-intensity warfare is necessary for the whole Army. From my own experience, I can relate that officer cadets at Royal Military Academy Sandhurst are not only trained in COIN technique, but also educated in its principles. Classroom instruction includes eleven case studies dealing with high- and low-intensity warfare; COIN and insurgency comprise one-third of these.<sup>50</sup>

American forces have provided much-needed information and advice on conducting high-intensity warfare to their British counterparts in the past. Given that the future of war is likely to include a greater focus on low-intensity operations, now may be the time for the Americans to ask the British to return the favor.<sup>51</sup> While the Americans may seek knowledge from the British, however, it should never be with the intention of applying British COIN structure to US military operations. The US military has its own history and traditions, and the mechanisms within its structure are significantly different, in mentality as well as organization. The Americans need to develop and implement their own system, shored up with advice from the British on lessons learned and pitfalls to avoid.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Colonel Richard Iron, "Decision Superiority," 29 April 2004.

<sup>50</sup> These case studies present the whole British experience, not just success stories. The limitations of British Army operations in Ireland, 1919-21, are examined, as well as the foundations they laid for future operations. The importance of doctrine is stressed, but so is the fact that it will need to be adapted to the particular environment in which the officers find themselves.

<sup>51</sup> General Jackson, Chief of the British Army, has commented that there is "friction" between the US and UK military forces in Iraq over differing low-intensity strategies.

<sup>52</sup> As an American working closely with the British military, I have had a unique opportunity to observe how the two systems compare and contrast.

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## **The Role of Technology in Low-Intensity Warfare?**

Technology will have a role to play in both high- and low-intensity conflicts of the future. Nevertheless, the drive for more technology or unmanned weapon systems may have a detrimental effect upon low-intensity operations. This pertains not only to weapons but also to potential over-reliance on technology to provide intelligence. To take a contemporary example: recent targeted missile attacks by the Israeli Defense Force (IDF) against Hamas have not stopped the campaign of suicide attacks, and may even be increasing resistance. To make matters worse, even targeted missiles do go astray and kill innocent people, particularly children. The propaganda value of this for the terrorist or insurgent is likely to outweigh the military value. The IDF and Israeli government need to recognize that reliance on technology alone is not going to defeat Hamas.

Dr Stephen Biddle's paper analyzing the American operations in Afghanistan in 2001-2 stresses that, while precision-guided munitions (PGMs) may have occasionally added value on the battlefield, they were not part of any revolution in military affairs arising from the war. He asserts that "as a whole, then, we should be wary of claims that Afghanistan represents a revolution in warfare. . . . [A]nd perhaps the most important of these lessons is that warfare's future may have more in common with its past than many in the current debate would have us believe."<sup>53</sup> This point is very important when considering issues of technology and how it could change the battlefield in the future. Biddle also points out that there has in the recent past been an overwhelming emphasis in the US military on technology for intelligence gathering. Operations in Afghanistan provided numerous examples of this, and highlighted the shortcomings of such an approach, as when US forces carried out a raid on a wedding party. To avoid similar mistakes, leading to civilian casualties and hostility, in the future, American and British forces must cultivate human intelligence in low-intensity operations. The enemies of the future will be able to understand us better; many of them will have been educated in the west or otherwise exposed to western society. We need to cultivate similar access. As Taw and Peters noted in 1995, the US Army and civil agencies must recognize that

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<sup>53</sup> Stephen Biddle, "Afghanistan and the Future of Warfare: Implications for Army and Defense Policy," Strategic Studies Institute, US Army, November 2002, pp. 56-7.

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“intelligence gathering is critical in OOTW. . . . [T]he importance of exploiting contacts with other agencies and local population should be made clear to US soldiers, as should the need for subtlety in such efforts so as to avoid aggravating local sensitivities.”<sup>54</sup>

A recent paper by Colonel Richard Iron, deputy Director of (British) Army Doctrine, on “Decision Superiority”<sup>55</sup> provides an up-to-date insight into the limitations of technology against an insurgency such as the one currently underway in Iraq. In all insurgencies, past and future, the initiative rests with the insurgents. The military and police must learn the doctrine and fighting methods of the insurgents in order to respond appropriately. However, as Colonel Iron has noted, “knowledge of the way insurgent or terrorist groups work is really important. But it doesn’t come easily or quickly. It comes from painstaking analysis of enemy patterns. . . . [A]dvanced IT certainly helps to store, retrieve, and analyse data, but it takes humans to collect the information in the first place. . . . [W]e need to work on [human and cultural] intelligence. . . . [I]t doesn’t come through satellite imagery. . . . [I]t comes from talking to people.”<sup>56</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Future wars may well encompass both high- and low-intensity conflict, but, despite the military superiority of the US and UK, they are likely to find themselves facing civil disorders, terrorists, and insurgencies if they choose to intervene in countries, for whatever reason (e.g., regime change, WMD, terrorists). The critical decision that the US and UK will face, in contemplating any future conflict, is whether the gain from engaging in that conflict is worth the risk of entangling military personnel in a long-term insurgency campaign. Having made this decision, the key to US and UK success in future campaigns will be the ability to operate at two different levels of conflict. Incorporating this adaptability does not represent a revolution in military affairs, but rather an evolutionary process. It is a necessary shift, but one that has a wealth of resources and historical precedent to draw upon in developing doctrine and training methods.

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<sup>54</sup> Taw and Peters, Vol. 6, p. 401.

<sup>55</sup> Paper presented at the Office of Net Assessment Seminar on Transformation and Operational Art (US, UK, Israel), April 29, 2004.

<sup>56</sup> Colonel Iron, p. 7.

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Technology is a useful adjunct to both present and future wars, but is unlikely to ever reach a level of sophistication that will render human intelligence gathering obsolete. Individual human contact and initiative are at the heart of every aspect of COIN doctrine, and skill in these areas will win the low-intensity conflicts of the future. The basic strategies of initiating low-intensity conflict have changed very little throughout the history of war, despite advances in technology and military thinking. Effective methods of countering low-intensity campaigns must take account of the realities of each situation, rather than rely on rigid doctrines or preconceived ideas.